ISSN 0712-7774

CEREBUS

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111
JUN

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

Well.

Here you are.

Or, rather. **There** you are.

You see, the thing I didn't tell you last issue is that all of these Notes from the President (108 through 111) have been written over a period of several days in late January. As I'm writing this, the covers to 107 to 111 have all been finished. We still need back cover photos for 110 and 111 and I'm waiting for all the Aardvark Comment typesetting to come back so I can paste it all up neat and lovely into the letters pages for 109, 110 and 111. As soon as **those** are done, Gerhard and I are off to New York to do an interview for the Village Voice (which might even be out there where you are) (which is to say here in your hands) (or at least nearby) (I feel lost, now).

Ah. Right. And when we get back, I start writing 108 through 111 (which is to say this issue right here) (in your hands, I mean) (or **there** if you're speaking from **my** point of view) (which is a mite presumptuous if you are) (unless you're **me** of course in which case it's all right) (I mean to **me**, here is here and there is there) (I'm the only one **here** and all the rest of you are **there**) (of course I'm not here at the same time you're there; because by the time you're there this is already done and I'm somewhere else entirely) (unless of course there's the **possibility** that I could be here when you're there), (but there's really no way of knowing) (Not even if you were to ring me up and **ask** me because the phone's in another room so if I answered and you said "I'm there; are you . . ?" I'd have to admit I wasn't) (of course I **could** move the phone in here but then what?) (Answer the phone twenty-five thousand times?) (I think not) (Besides you don't even have my number) (Tell you what? I'll give it to you . . . 519-74 . . .) (I'm sorry I'm running out of room)

Is that it?

Really? All the Notes from the President?

ALL **RIGHT**!!

So, thanks to all of you for your support and your letters and stuff.

We're out of here?

Thank you! THANK YOU ALL! GOOD-NIGHT!

SEE YOU IN **AUGUST**!!!

Cerebus 112 and 113 will be released under one cover in August 1988. Like issue 51 the forty-page story is a transition between novels and as such will never be reprinted.

CEREBUS

NO. 111 JUNE 1988

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Backgrounds, cover-colour, and tones

KAREN McKIEL
Administrator

Circulation
31,500

CHURCH AND STATE
a novel

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 52 to Cerebus 56)
Aprés State

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 57 to Cerebus 63)
Back to Iest

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 64 to Cerebus 80)
Church and State

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 81 to Cerebus 89)
The Sacred Wars

•

BOOK FIVE
(Cerebus 90 to Cerebus 101)
Astoria

•

BOOK SIX
(Cerebus 102 to Cerebus 106)
The Final Ascension

•

BOOK SEVEN
(Cerebus 107 to Cerebus 111)
Walking On The Moon

•

CEREBUS IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC. PO BOX 1674 STN. C KITCHENER ONTARIO CANADA N2G 4R2

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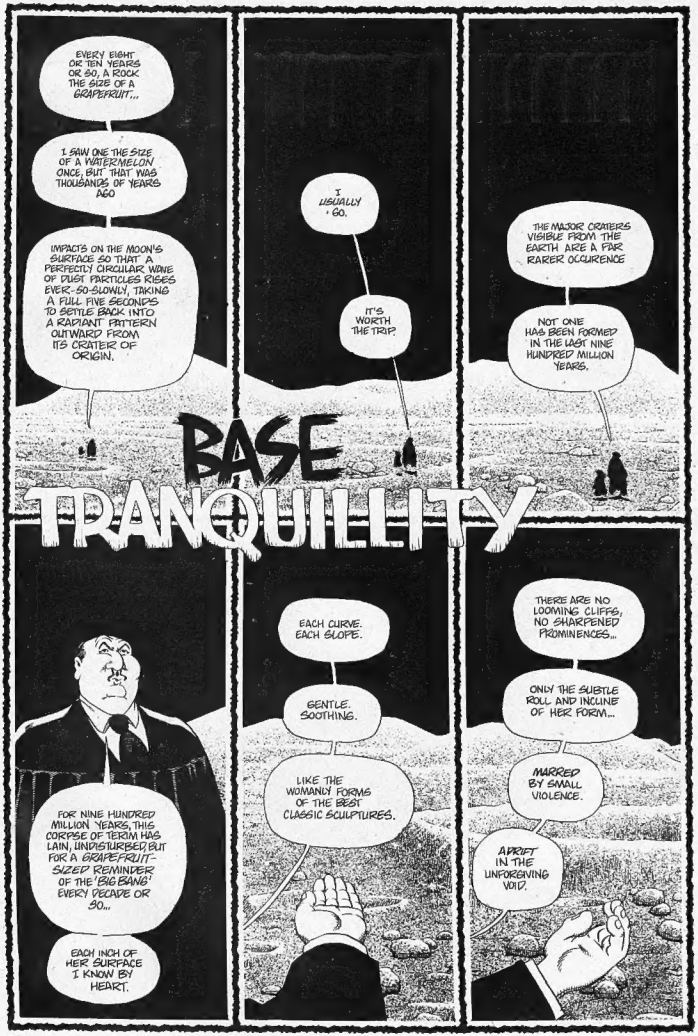
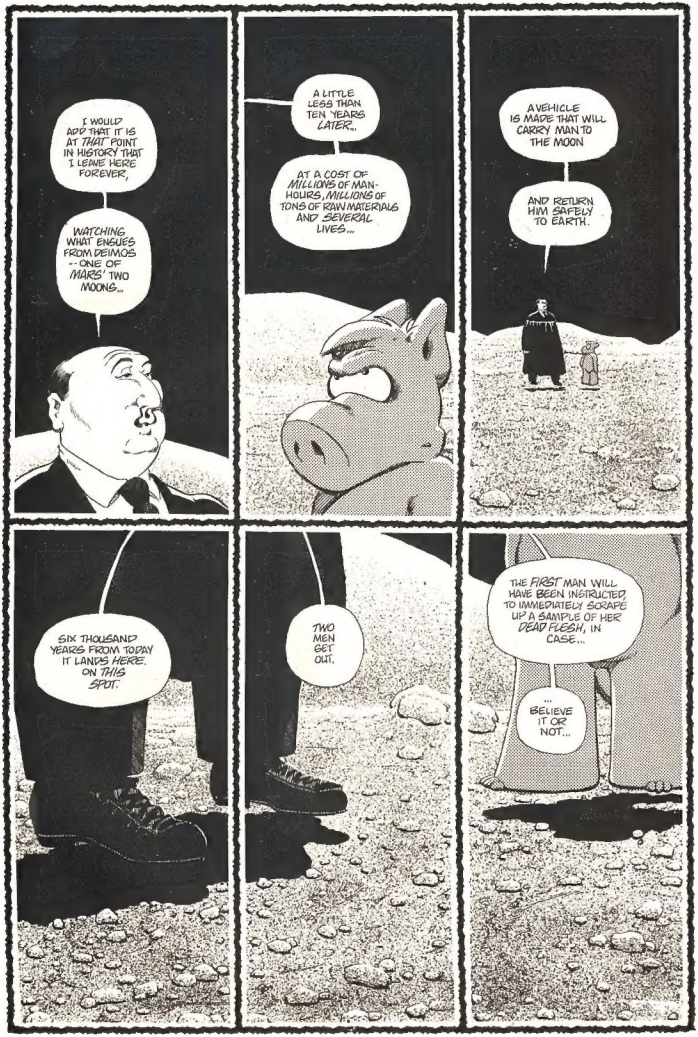
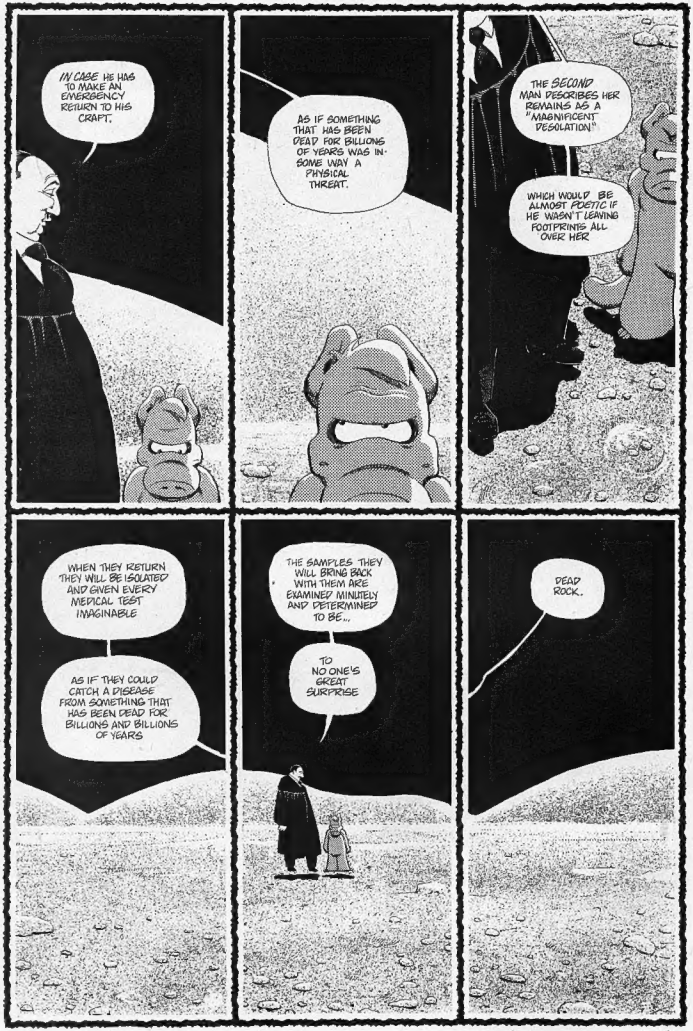

EVERY EIGHT OR TEN YEARS OR SO, A ROCK THE SIZE OF A GRAPEFRUIT...
I SAW ONE THE SIZE OF A WATERMELON ONCE, BUT THAT WAS THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO
IMPACTS ON THE MOON'S SURFACE SO THAT A PERFECTLY CIRCULAR WAVE OF DUST PARTICLES RISES EVER-SO-SLOWLY, TAKING A FULL FIVE SECONDS TO SETTLE BACK INTO A RADIANT PATTERN OUTWARD FROM ITS CRATER OF ORIGIN.
I USUALLY GO.
IT'S WORTH THE TRIP.
THE MAJOR CRATERS VISIBLE FROM THE EARTH ARE A FAR RARER OCCURENCE
NOT ONE HAS BEEN FORMED IN THE LAST NINE HUNDRED MILLION YEARS.
BASE TRANQUILITY
FOR NINE HUNDRED MILLION YEARS, THIS CORPSE OF TERRA HAS LAIN, UNDISTURBED, BUT FOR A GRAPEFRUIT-SIZED REMINDER OF THE 'BIG BANG' EVERY DECADE OR SO...
EACH INCH OF HER SURFACE I KNOW BY HEART.
EACH CURVE. EACH SLOPE.
GENTLE. SOOTHING.
LIKE THE WOMANLY FORMS OF THE BEST CLASSIC SCULPTURES.
THERE ARE NO LOOMING CLIFFS, NO SHARPENED PROMINENCES...
ONLY THE SUBTLE ROLL AND INCLINE OF HER FORM...
MARRED BY SMALL VIOLENCE.
APART IN THE UNFORGIVING VOID.

UNTIL A LITTLE LESS THAN SIX THOUSAND YEARS FROM NOW WHEN TWO COUNTRIES
BOTH IN THE FULL FLOWERING OF MALE-DOMINATED CIVILISATION AT THE APEX OF ITS DOMINATION
FIRST ONE AND THEN THE OTHER
PENETRATE INTO HER CORPSE WITH METAL BUNDLES
AND...
IN THE SPACE OF FIVE YEARS
...SIX MORE.
THE EIGHTH ONE FINALLY WORKS.
AND SENDS BACK VOLUMES AND VOLUMES OF INFORMATION INDICATING...
BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT
...THAT THE MOON IS COMPOSED OF DEAD ROCK.
FOR MOST PEOPLE, THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH...
AND THEY WOULD LEAVE HER REST IN PEACE.
BUT. THIS IS THE FULL FLOWERING OF MALE-DOMINATED CIVILISATION AT THE APEX OF ITS DOMINATION.
SO THE GHOULISHNESS CONTINUES.

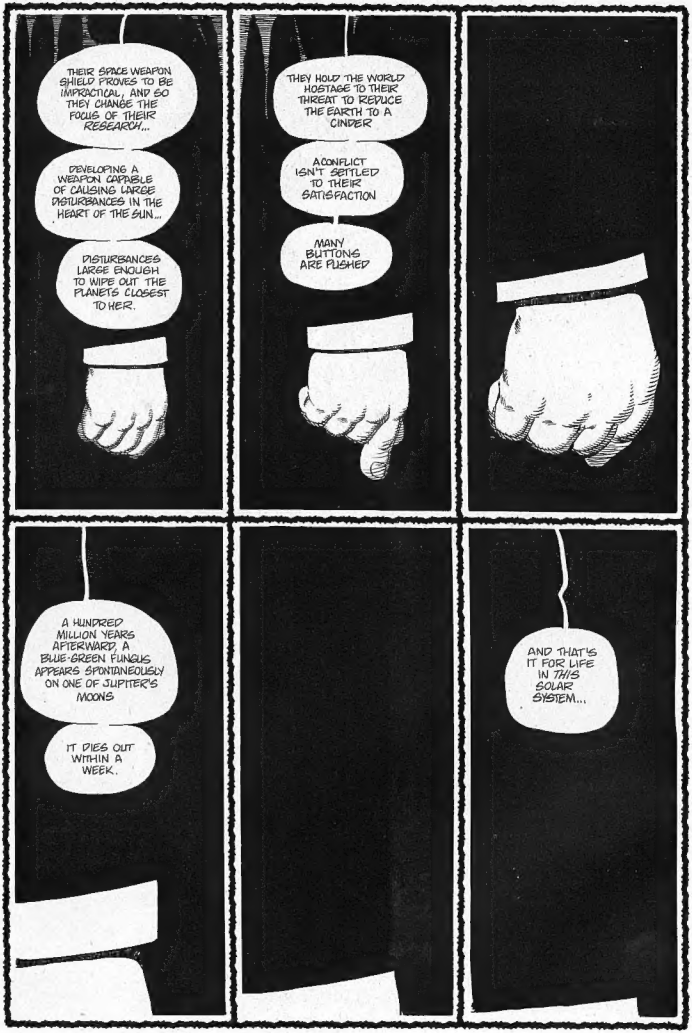

I WOULD ADD THAT IT IS AT *THAT* POINT IN HISTORY THAT I LEAVE HERE FOREVER,
WATCHING WHAT ENSUES FROM DEIMOS -- ONE OF *MARS'* TWO MOONS...
A LITTLE LESS THAN TEN YEARS *LATER*...
AT A COST OF *MILLIONS* OF MAN-HOURS, *MILLIONS* OF TONS OF RAW MATERIALS AND *SEVERAL* LIVES...
A VEHICLE IS MADE THAT WILL CARRY MAN TO THE MOON
AND RETURN HIM SAFELY TO EARTH.
SIX THOUSAND YEARS FROM TODAY IT LANDS *HERE*, ON *THIS* SPOT.
TWO MEN GET OUT.
THE *FIRST* MAN WILL HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO IMMEDIATELY SCRAPE UP A SAMPLE OF HER *DEAD FLESH*, IN CASE...
BELIEVE IT OR NOT...


IN CASE HE HAS TO MAKE AN EMERGENCY RETURN TO HIS CRAFT.
AS IF SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN DEAD FOR BILLIONS OF YEARS WAS IN SOME WAY A PHYSICAL THREAT.
THE SECOND MAN DESCRIBES HER REMAINS AS A "MAGNIFICENT DESOLATION."
WHICH WOULD BE ALMOST POETIC IF HE WASN'T LEAVING FOOTPRINTS ALL OVER HER
WHEN THEY RETURN THEY WILL BE ISOLATED AND GIVEN EVERY MEDICAL TEST IMAGINABLE
AS IF THEY COULD CATCH A DISEASE FROM SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN DEAD FOR BILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF YEARS
THE SAMPLES THEY WILL BRING BACK WITH THEM ARE EXAMINED MINUTELY AND DETERMINED TO BE...
TO NO ONE'S GREAT SURPRISE
DEAD ROCK.

FOR MOST PEOPLE THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH AND THEY WOULD LEAVE HER TO REST IN PEACE.
BUT THIS IS THE FULL FLOWERING OF MALE-DOMINATED CIVILISATION AT ITS APEX.
SO ANOTHER EXPEDITION IS READIED.
THAT ONE PICKS UP SOME OF THE JUNK FROM TEN YEARS BEFORE AND...
IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS
...LEAVES MUCH LARGER PIECES OF JUNK BEHIND.
THE SAMPLES THEY BRING BACK PROVE REMARKABLY SIMILAR TO THE SAMPLES OBTAINED BY THE FIRST BUNCH.
MORE DEAD ROCK.

THE NEXT EXPEDITION SUFFERS AN ON-BOARD EXPLOSION... IS CRIPPLED
AND RETURNS HOME WITHOUT DESECRATING HER CORPSE IN ANY WAY.
THE EXPLOSION IS CAUSED BY A SWITCH IN THE MAIN POWER SOURCE WHICH HAS BEEN WELDED SHUT
INSTEAD OF BEING LEFT FREE.
FOR MOST PEOPLE, THERE WOULD BE A MESSAGE IN THIS.
BUT THIS IS THE FULL FLOWERING OF MALE-DOMINATED CIVILISATION AT ITS APEX.
SO THERE IS ANOTHER EXPEDITION.
THIS TIME THEY BRING A LITTLE CARRIAGE SO THEY CAN SPREAD THEIR GARBAGE FURTHER
AND LEAVE A WIDER VARIETY OF TRICKS ON HER CORPSE
THERE IS ANOTHER EXPEDITION.
THEY HIT A FEW GOLF BALLS OFF HER CORPSE.
ANOTHER CARRIAGE.
THE NEXT EXPEDITION IS INSTRUCTED TO DRILL A HOLE AND THRUST AN INSTRUMENT INTO THE HOLE TO DETERMINE HOW HOT HER CORPSE IS INSIDE.
ONE OF THE MEN ACCIDENTALLY BREAKS THE INSTRUMENT.
FOR MOST PEOPLE THERE WOULD BE A MESSAGE IN THIS.

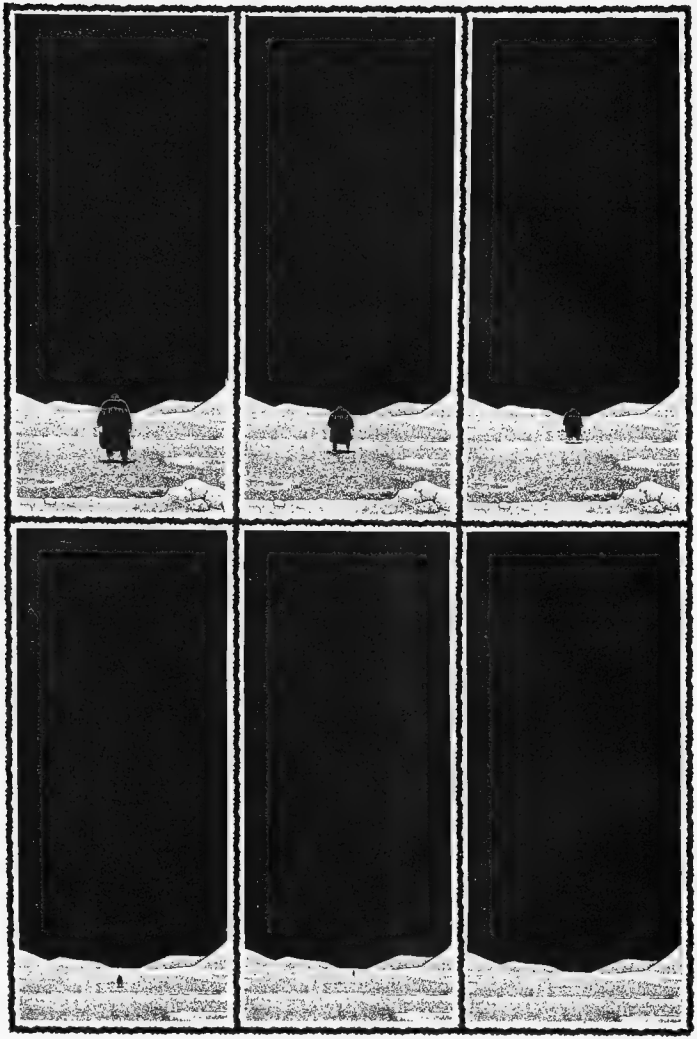
THE NEXT EXPEDITION.
THEIR LAST ONE.
BRINGS AN UNBREAKABLE REPLACEMENT. THEY DRILL. THEY THRUST. THEY FIND OUT HER CORPSE IS FIFTEEN HUNDRED DEGREES AT ITS CORE.
THEY ARE VERY PLEASED WITH THEMSELVES
SHE EXTRUDES A FEW ORANGE BEADS FROM THE DUST ON HER SURFACE ...WHICH ONE OF THE MEN FINDS.
THERE IS NO RATIONAL EXPLANATION FOR THEIR EXISTENCE.
AS A RESULT, THEY ARE QUICKLY FORGOTTEN.
AND ALL EXPEDITIONS TO THE MOON ARE SUSPENDED, EVEN THOUGH FOUR MORE HAD BEEN PLANNED
TEN YEARS LATER. THIS COUNTRY
THE ORIGINAL ADVOCATES OF THE PEACEFUL COLONISATION OF SPACE
DECIDE TO BUILD GIANT SPACE WEAPONS
STRICTLY FOR DEFENSE OF COURSE.
ONE OF THEIR SPACE FLIGHTS BLOWS UP, KILLING -- AMONG OTHERS --
A FEMALE TEACHER.

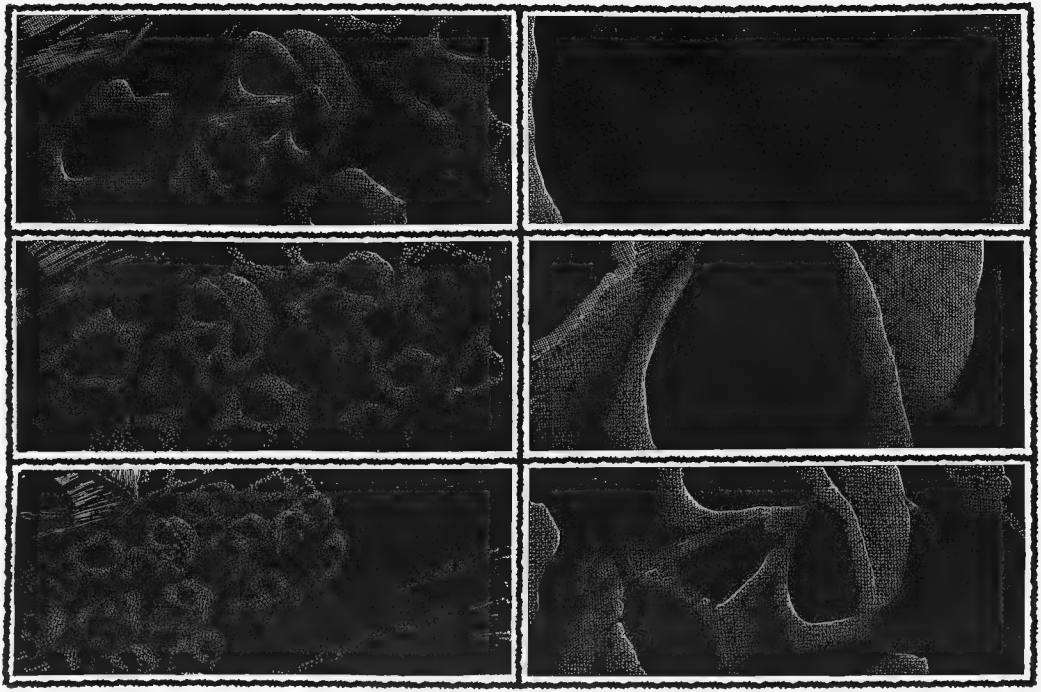

THEIR SPACE WEAPON SHIELD PROVES TO BE IMPRACTICAL, AND SO THEY CHANGE THE FOCUS OF THEIR RESEARCH...
DEVELOPING A WEAPON CAPABLE OF CAUSING LARGE DISTURBANCES IN THE HEART OF THE SUN...
DISTURBANCES LARGE ENOUGH TO WIPE OUT THE PLANETS CLOSEST TO HER.
THEY HOLD THE WORLD HOSTAGE TO THEIR THREAT TO REDUCE THE EARTH TO A CINDER
A CONFLICT ISN'T SETTLED TO THEIR SATISFACTION
MANY BUTTONS ARE PUSHED
A HUNDRED MILLION YEARS AFTERWARD, A BLUE-GREEN FUNGUS APPEARS SPONTANEOUSLY ON ONE OF JUPITER'S MOONS
IT DIES OUT WITHIN A WEEK.
AND THAT'S IT FOR LIFE IN THIS SOLAR SYSTEM...

DO?
YOU MEAN PERSONALLY?
HOW?
IT IS NECESSARY... ACCORDING TO DOSTOEVSKY'S ADVICE...
TO ACCEPT SUFFERING AND BE REDEEMED BY IT...

WHILE YOU WERE GONE, THE PEARLINE "YOU BET" FOR THE END OF THE WORLD CAME AND WENT WITHOUT INCIDENT.
ALL OF YOUR FOLLOWERS HAVE DESERTED YOU
CIRIN HAS ATTACKED AND SEIZED, WITH HEIR MERCENARY FORCES...
LOWER FELDA AND ALL OF IEST.
INCLUDING ALL OF THE GOLD YOU HAD IN YOUR HOTEL
YOU LIVE ONLY A FEW MORE YEARS,
YOU DIE ALONE. UNMOURNED.
AND UNLOVED.
SUFFERING...
SUFFERING YOU'LL HAVE NO TROUBLE DOING.

AND IF YOU ARE TEMPTED-- EVER-- TO CONSIDER YOUR SUFFERING UNJUSTIFIED
JUST REMEMBER
YOUR SECOND MARRIAGE





FIN

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STEVE GEPPI'S SPEECH

The following is an exerpt of a speech given by Steve Geppi on Tuesday, April 26, 1988 during DIAMOND DIALOGUE at the 5th annual Diamond Seminar in Washington, D.C.

There is something that I want to address with you that I think is significant and important and I hope the publishers will bear with me on this because they have been through this Sunday night. Some of the retailers have, through mainly the publishers, will know what I'm going to talk about.

There is another announcement that I made, albeit one that I had not prepared to make, Friday when I arrived in Baltimore coming back from a DC meeting in South Carolina. I know all of you are aware of the situation that developed between Diamond and Aardvark-Vanaheim. I thought it would be appropriate, at a time like this, when I'm standing in front of so many of my customers and so many people in the industry, to just kind of clarify what that situation was.

As you no doubt have read about and saw, there was a letter that was communicated to Dave Sim by Bill Schanes in reference to our position, as to how he handled High Society. As you all know that is a pretty frustrating situation; as retailers, you want to get as much product as you can from the publishers, particularly in cases where you've supported the publisher to his success. It's kind of irritating when there is another project that you know your customers want, and you have to tell them you can't give it to them because it's not available to you. But, nonetheless, each person is entitled to his own discretion. If he wants to sell something direct or what have you, he is entitled to do that.

But, in discussing that with Dave, the first time around when the first printing came out, we had a very good conversation. I don't know how long ago this was — a year and a half ago or something like that — and, while I disagreed with Dave about it, it became water under the bridge.

Then later on, Dave decided, perhaps maybe because of the conversation with me, I don't know, to consider doing a second printing of High Society and to make it available to distributors. He communicated that to us; at the time he indicated that if he could get 6,000 copies of orders that it would be cost-effective enough for him to be able to make it available to us at a discount that we could pass on to you that would fit the direct market's requirement.

To our surprise, and as you've read about, when Diamond turned in an order that was better than a third of his share as we perceive it to be, when suddenly, instead of getting our copies, got a press release indicating that we weren't going to get this because Dave had decided that the numbers were insufficient for the market.

We were surprised but at the same token we felt, "well, we'll call Dave up and find out what's going on." Well, you read about how Dave has a feeling that he doesn't talk to anyone but the president, so I guess maybe I've fallen down on the job there, I don't know. But I felt that I had a person who was in charge of purchasing — who had the authority to buy — to call him. So it seemed a reasonable approach to ask the man whether we could, you know, negotiate something.

As it turns out, one of the major distributors had forgotten to solicit it and that — if that had been as simple as it was stated — we could have fixed it there, or even Diamond could have offered — in fact, we did — to buy the entire print run", because we felt that strongly about the product. But, nonetheless, the letter was communicated because we just couldn't get Dave to return Bill's phone calls.

You read the letter, perhaps in Cerebus; it was reprinted. I personally feel that that letter was a very professional letter — one that stated very clearly that we were not threatening to not carry Puma Blues, but rather we were beckoning Dave to make a responsible call to his — one of his major accounts. Well, you saw what followed: Dave responsed to the press. He felt we were big bullies and that we were persecuting creators and what have you and the like. And, while I don't feel at all that that was the case, in reading those articles, I noticed that Dave entreated me to call him personally and perhaps we could work it out.

First of all, Diamond always takes the position that your interests are first. Even if we have to swallow our pride sometimes, we try to get the product for you because we figure that's a cost we can absorb up to a point. And, so I called Dave and I had a very unique conversation, I might say, for two hours. And in that conversation, while I was rather frustrated, it was a rather pleasant conversation. It was as pleasant as it could be under the circumstances. And I stressed to Dave that my purpose in calling him was about High Society anymore, but it was Puma Blues, and to reassure him that I had no intention, as I thought the letter clearly stated, to not carry Puma Blues.

So Dave still stood his ground and said that, no, he wasn't going to make it available, and he gave different reasons about High Society but then I said okay, well, I'll still carry Puma Blues. I don't agree with you. I have to tell my retailers that you're not going to allow them to have it — at least not through us — but, you know, then I disagree with your misinterpreting the value of the retailer/distributor link, but that's your prerogative. I'll still carry Puma Blues beacause I think they'd like to have the product and I don't want bad press for the industry because that doesn't help anybody.

That's why I must tell you: that's pretty tough to do, especially when at the time you tell him that you already have a copy of the letter that was pretending to be printed in Cerebus, and, you assume, that at the end of that conversation that, well, everything's well and he's not going to print that letter. Although I really didn't care that much I felt the letter was actually in our favor once people read it. Nonetheless, that was a little irritating when the letter appeared, but, perhaps the reason was that it was already to press and it couldn't be stopped, I don't know.

Then we read about the article in the, ah, Comics Journal and, you know, they're doing their job, and they mentioned this situation and they talk about the headlines that "Diamond Backs Down." I think — if you hear what I'm saying — that wasn't really the case. We deferred because we felt that, you know, it wasn't in the interest of the industry, and so much for that.

At that point, it's kind of like a "strike two" situation, though, if you know what I mean. I come back from Hilton Head, South Carolina Friday night, and I have to tell you: there was a seminar planned, I had a million other things I had to be dealing with, and the last thing I needed to see was this.

I want to read you something that I got in the mail from Aardvark One International. It says: "Attention all distributors" — it's regarding a special benefit issue of The Puma Blues — "The Puma Blues #20, shipping late July, 1988, will

be a benefit issue containing material contributed by a number of comic writers and artists. Contributions have been made in order to show solidarity for Puma creators Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli, in light of the unfair emotional and economic strain they have experienced as a result of Diamond Distributors' problem with Dave Sim over High Society." . . . and it goes on to list all the different creators who are contributing.

First of all, I don't know where in the world they got the idea that there was economic strain, because we never missed an issue. In fact, we're still way ahead of schedule, due to them being behind schedule. And, as far as emotional strain, that's very subjective.

I have to tell you, at this point, as I said to the publishers Sunday night, there's a mirror in my bathroom that I get up every morning and I look in, and there's no way — there's no way in hell that I can go and look at that mirror in the morning and respect myself if I continue to do business with a man who shows no respect for me. He is trying to humiliate my company, he has tried to humiliate one of my employees through that letter and not only that, he's trying to get me to finance it.

I'm sorry, as your distributor, to tell you that I'm going to make one phone call to this man, even as a last-ditch effort, for him to have the opportunity to tell me that this is some kind of an April Fool's joke, because if it isn't and I expect his answer to be negative, then there's no way I'm going to deal with Aardvark-Vanaheim for Puma Blues, Cerebus, or any other publication that he comes out with.

If that is an inconvenience for you, I'm terribly sorry as your distributor to have to do that, but I hope that your inconvenience will be more than outweighed in perhaps some respect for Diamond's position on this. I don't know how you feel, but that's what I have to do.

The tape and transcription is courtesy of Cheryl H. Prindle, Executive Director of Mirage Studios.

** At no time did Steve Geppi offer to buy the entire print run of High Society's second printing. I don't know what I would have done if he had, just as I don't know what I would've done had Milton and John offered to buy what remained of the 6000 copies. I answer only serious offers; not revisionst or hypothetical ones.*

MY SPEECH

The following is a speech made by Dave Sim to the Capital City Sales Conference May 9, 1988.

The only job I've ever had in my life.

The only **real** job, that is (laughter).

Was working three days a week in a comic book store called Now & Then Books. I still have dinner with the owner, Harry Kremer frequently, in order to keep up with what is going on in the direct sales trenches. I ask a million questions, charting the course of yesterday's news and tomorrows hits, searching out first inklings of future patterns.

Harry never asks for my advice and I think that is largely attributable to the fact that, in running the downstairs of his shop twelve years my cash seldom balanced at the end of the day.

I think Harry views me as either a criminal or incompetent (laughter).

In fact I was both (laughter). I usually stole from the till enough money to buy a Mars bar or two in the course of my working day and I was so lousy at math that I never concealed my tracks adequately. I like to think buying all of you guys dinner constitutes paying back a comicshop karmic debt (laughter). I'm not sure Harry would agree (laughter) but that's what I like to think.

Originally I had not intended to be here.

It has been my policy to separate the creative and the business side of the direct sales environment insofar as it is possible to do so. Since trade shows and sales conferences have begun to proliferate I have stuck by that decision believing whole-heartedly that there should be an environment where business should be able to talk **to** business **about** business.

Without interference, interruption or undue influence.

If a comic book creator is interested in addressing a group, he is better served doing so at a convention or a shop-signing.

Additionally, there is no reason for a comic book creator-self-publisher to address any group other than his real or potential audience. He is an entertainer first and foremost. A story-teller. To switch hats as it is convenient for him — to address comic shop owners who are almost invariably fans as well as businessman — to address them first as a publisher, then as a working artist and finally as a fellow fan is to set a dangerous precedent. While attending a sales conference, you are better served to be thinking with your wallets applying all of your efforts to improving first your own particular business environment, your own shop, and secondly the overall business of direct sales comics. In a situation like that an artist, though well-intentioned, becomes a needless distraction.

Having said all that. Why am I here being a needless distraction?

The fact that Madison, Wisconsin has always been a Cerebus town, the fact that Capital City, sponsors of this event and one of Cerebus' largest distributors, are headquartered here. The fact that I wanted to apologize publicly for calling John Davis an underling — I'm sorry, John — the fact that I wanted to see if everything I had heard about Milton's hair was true (laughter).

It is (laughter).

These were all factors, but more than anything else my attendance was the most cost-effective means at hand to drive Steve Geppi nuts (laughter).

It seems to have worked.

A couple of weeks ago.

At the Diamond Comics Sales Conference.

The President of Diamond Comics twice announced to his retailers and to the attending publishers that he would no longer carry Cerebus or The Puma Blues.

I don't imagine he's any more serious now than he was when he had Bill Schanes inform me that he would no longer carry The Puma Blues or than he was when he announced on the front page of the Comic's Buyers Guide he would carry The Puma Blues again. Trying to figure out **what** Diamond thinks, **how** Diamond thinks, is like trying to figure out **what** and **how** Ed Meese thinks. The mistake is in presupposing that there is thought involved, since all evidence is very much to the contrary.

It does, however, place me in an awkward situation of having to do something about this . . . bad apple in the distributors barrel.

If, as my instincts tell me to, I decide to suspend all shipments to Diamond Comics, I will be penalizing his retail accounts and their customers for the ill-considered gestures of a simple kind of guy clearly playing out of his league, with resources not his own.

However, having stopped all shipments to Bud Plant warehouse #7 for attempting to return non-returnable books I would be very much remiss in not taking a similarly strong stance against someone clearly judging himself a rule-maker in our happy community accountable only to the executives at Marvel and DC.

The fact that Steve tried to contact me after his sabre-rattling speech, the fact that the only message he had to relay through my administrator, Karen McKiel was that he was unhappy that a benefit issue of The Puma Blues was being prepared to offset the loss incurred by his decision to no longer carry the book. (Naturally enough she referred him to Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli .) The fact that he said not a word about no longer carrying Cerebus; indicated to me that I was dealing with a very low form indeed, of political life. The form that talks tough publicly and among his peers; but who, in private conversation with his opponents, vacillates, pleads, is obsequious, compromises the approximations he uses for views and ultimately retreats from his position; leaving the public record of his tough talk to bear mute testimony to a mythological force-to-be-reckoned-with that **has** never and **will** never be.

It was the unanimous support expressed to me by the loosely-knit coalition of self-publishers and soon-to-be self-publishers that has encouraged me to find a political solution to this problem creators call Diamond Comics Distributors.

Our coalition, though mere weeks old, already goes by many names.

-The Gang of Twelve (laughter)

-The Government of Associated Self-Publishers (GASP). (laughter) That was my suggestion.

-The Allied Publishing Cartoonists

-The Superman Revenge Squad (laughter)

The roster consists of myself, Gerhard, Kevin Eastman, Peter Laird, Michael Zulli, Stephen Murphy, Steve Bissette, John Totleben, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave Gibbons, Frank Miller and Alan Moore.

Lest anyone get the idea that I'm the toughest nut to crack out of this bunch, let me say that Frank Miller's suggestion . . . I hope it was a joke, but with Frank you can never really tell . . . was that the twelve of us should **kill** Steve Geppi (laughter). His (laughter) . . . his (laughter) . . . his reasoning being that if we were convicted and sent to prison, we could start a riot, get thrown into solitary confinement and there . . . We could at last be free of all these moronic distractions and devote ourselves without interruption to the telling of stories.

Leaving Frank's suggestion aside . . .

Much as it pains me to do so.

I have arrived at the conclusion that Diamond Comics like anyone else, has to be treated fairly. As comic book creators we are unanimous in this view even Frank; deep down inside.

We bear in mind, however, that for fifty years the business community has treated the creative community with total contempt, while paying lip-service to appreciation.

This must come to an end.

This **will** come to an end.

If the twelve people I have named were asked to choose at this point in time between soliciting Diamond Comics ever again as distributors for their creative work or making-do with the remaining distribution network, a clear majority of us would be opposed to ever again dealing with Diamond. None of us had any reservations about dealing with any of the other distributors currently controlling the direct sales market. Particular appreciation was expressed for Capital City and Bud Plant Inc., for non-interference in the creative freedom of the Direct Sales market place despite substantial economic leverage.

A minority of the members of our group would vote to continue shipping to Diamond if asked today to make a decision. I conducted my informal poll over the last week (May 1st to the 8th).

Between July 1st, 1988 the one hundred and twenty-first anniversary of Canada and July 4th, 1988 the two hundred and eleventh anniversary of the United States; at a summit conference in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, these twelve people will debate a motion to withdraw our work from Diamond Comics' Distribution network.

We are confident that whatever the outcome, Diamond Comics will continue to thrive with or without our modest and marginal share of the direct sales market.

Those of us who have worked with you in the past thank you for your support of creative freedom.

Those who will be working with you for the first time beginning later this year, relay their greetings and good wishes.

Leaving aside my formal response to Steve Geppi 's threats, I would like to address, now, not the immediate future of Cerebus or myself or self-publishing. What I would like to do is to address myself to you who make up the retail community. To tell you that I have a picture in my mind of comic book shops. Not as they are. Most of them.

But of how they might be.

I have a picture of the comic shop revolution beginning again, anew, as it did twenty years ago.

It is a picture of a comic book store whose centre-piece is not the new Punisher mini-series, but a store with a tasteful window display of Artie Spiegelmen's Maus. A comic shop not eagerly awaiting Secret Wars III, but a comic shop which sells complete sets of Love and Rockets, rare issues and new collector's items. A comic shop dedicated to the art of our medium and the artisans responsible for that art. A comic shop whose idea of expansion is not four floors of adolescents pawing through back-issues of whatever John Byrne has pawed through and abandoned, but a small and exclusive environment introducing new generations to the wonders of Kurtzman's war comics, Stanley's Little Lulu, Krigstein's E.C. work.

It is a dream.

No question.

But it is a dream as much as comic shops themselves were a dream. As much as comic book conventions were a dream. As much as self-publishing or this sales conference were dreams. **Our** dreams.

But it is time for us to realise who shares our dream . . . and who seeks to exploit it merely for material gain. It will begin where all impossible dreams begin. In the large metropolitan centres.

Where someone said in the 1940's "The hell with department stores, I'm going to open a record store. Where all you will buy is records". Where someone said twenty years later, "The hell with record stores, I'm going to open a store that only sells rock 'n' roll".

Each, in his time was called a dreamer. Each in his time was considered mad. Each, in his time, was proven right.

It is this kind of madness; which prefers the adventurous over the safe; the daring over the tried and true; the innovative over that which declares itself innovative; the different over that which claims difference, the new instead of that which is tired and repetitive and is new only in to cover blurbs and press releases.

We are well on the way to realizing that dream.

Hype and a slick advertising campaign when one is selling Watchmen or Dark Knight become valuable tools; genuine reflections of the quality that is as close as the nearest comic book store.

But that same hype and slick advertising campaign, applied to also-rans, retreads of bad ideas, slim notions and clicheed story-lines embarrasses us whether we are Frank Miller, Dave Sim and Alan Moore or Steve Geppi, Milton Grieppe and Bud Plant.

I say to you, therefore, that as creators; whether plotting new creations or contributing to past accomplishments; we observe you closely. We pray that you will choose wisely — that you will realize that each comic book that fools the gullible, that pays lip-service to quality or rides the coat-tails of genuine quality diminishes the Love and Rockets, The Mauses, The Watchmen's, The Dark Knights.

These works are too few to withstand a sustained onslaught of the mediocre , the below average, and the merely lucrative.

In so many ways, in the day to day workings of this most rare and magical of mediums — it is **your** emphasis.

The books **you** sell.

The books **you** advocate.

The books **you** align yourself with.

Which speaks to the population at large and dictates how we are viewed and described.

A wall full of Wolverines by faceless hacks, this year's Punisher last year's G.I. Joe, a book shelf stuffed with quick exploitations of a quote "revitalized super-hero" unquote. Bins upon bins upon bins of Marvel Two-In-Ones, Marvel Spotlight, Werewolf by Night priced to sell , but not selling, priced below Overstreet but still going begging for buyers condemn you in my opinion to remain puppets of Marvel and DC as you've been in the past, as you are in the present, and as you might well be in the future.

A monthly guessing-game with your order form — trying to anticipate when you are being offered a real winner that will help pay the rent and all-too-often when you are being had with product — for most of it is precisely that; so many cans of beans; undistinguished and indistinguishable — the creative equivelent of smoke and mirrors.

But the future is yours to decide. Not Jenette Kahn. Not Tom DeFalco. Not Dave Sim. And the future is coming and going, month by month, order form by order form.

If it **is** time for a change (and I suspect it is). It is **you** who have the reins in your hands, the means at your disposal to determine the fate and the future of our medium.

It can be as simple as ordering five fewer cans of beans and five more copies of Raw or The Spirit or Love and Rockets. It can be as radical as putting everything good in one place. Taking everything in your shop that would appeal to an educated and curious outsider, everything that you can point to and say "**There**. There is what comics **can** be. What comics **should** be" and displaying them prominently.

All change whether large or small is incremental .

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

We invite you to take that step with us.

Thank you.

Frank Miller's LETTER TO STEVE GEPPI

Dear Mr. Geppi:

Maggie Thompson has informed me that Dave Sim's quotation of a bad joke by myself has caused you alarm. Please understand that the crack was made during an ungodly hour of the morning, when I was very tired and aggravated to have lost several days of work time over Diamond's conflict with Aardvark-Vanaheim. The crack was in utterly poor taste. Please accept my profound apologies.

I have made a public statement to the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE to this effect, and will do the same in WAPI , the freelancer's newsletter.

This conflict has been an unfortunate one, and it could be a costly one for all of us. I'm told by several sources that Diamond wishes it to end without further threats and retaliations from either side. While I cannot speak for anyone but myself, my feeling is that it would be resolved by a single statement from Diamond, clearing up the matter. Does Diamond plan to refuse to carry Aardvark-Vanaheim's books? I sincerely hope that your remarks at the Diamond Seminar were as much a product of fatigue and aggravation as was my stupid and much-regretted joke.

If so, please send a statement, however brief, to me. I will see to it that it will run unedited in WAPI.

We have nothing to gain from further confusion and hostilities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Regards, Frank Miller

THE END(?) OF THE GEPPI CRISIS

Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter. I very much appreciate your prompt handling of the Dave Sim quote and the opportunity it gives me to finally communicate with you directly.

For the record, I tried to call you a couple of weeks ago in an attempt to open the lines of communication between us. You were busy or out so I left a message for you to call on your recorder.

In addition to telling you my side of the Dave Sim story, I had planned to tell you personally of the other, more important announcement I made at my seminar. Perhaps by now, you have already heard that Diamond will be opening up its product lines to include many never before carried items. Items such as Catalan Publications, Yummy Fur, Omaha etc.. In addition to this I made it clear to my accounts in the most recent Diamond Dialogue what the criteria would be for carrying or not carrying an item. I have enclosed a copy and believe you will find it to be self-explanatory. However, should you have questions concerning this, I would very much like to speak with you directly so that I can answer any questions you may have and perhaps assure you of Diamond's intentions as it relates to this new positioning. I would like the opportunity to explain what prompted the Dave Sim situation and my subsequent action.

Even now, despite the lambasting I was given at the Capital Sales Conference in Dave's speech, I am still willing to go on record as stating that Diamond intends to carry all Aardvark-Vanaheim and Aardvark One International publications should they be offered to us.

I did indicate publicly at my seminar that I was prepared not to do so should The Puma Blues benefit issue turn out to be a deliberate attempt to embarass or ridicule my company. I am sure you can understand my not wanting to help finance my own humiliation. Not being able to speak with Dave Sim directly, I took the initiative to call Stephen Murphy and had a very pleasant and reassuring conversation wherein he calmed my fears about the benefit issue and assured me that it was in no way their intention to embarass Diamond. He even indicated that he would be willing to clarify this, if necessary in a press release if this perception existed. I wish I had talked to Stephen sooner so this whole situation might have been avoided. However, what's done is done and I have no desire to prolong this issue.

Please inform your fellow creators that Diamond will continue to carry all Aardvark publications and that the issue is closed as far as we are concerned.

Frank, in the future, I would like for you to view Diamond as an ally and not an adversary. The comic industry is growning in leaps and bounds and there is no need for the past to slow our progress down. Your creative freedom need not be threatened by Diamond, Steve Geppi , or anyone else. I would like to assist you in your endeavors.

I know you are busy and so am I but I think it is time we talked. I can be reached at (301) 298-2981 during the week. My home number is (###) ###-####. I look forward to hearing from you and again thank you for your communication with me.

Best,

Stephen Geppi

P.S. I am enclosing transcripts of my speech and Dave Sim's for your perusal.

THE ANNOTATED BUD PLANT LETTER

I am going to take advantage of my control over this letters page to answer Bud's points in the body of his letter rather than at the end. I hope this is the last time I have to address any of these issues. I kind of doubt it, though.

Dear Dave,

If I had not stepped into handle Alternate Realities' retailers, you would have been left with copies printed but with no distributor to ship to. Some of the books would have been absorbed in reorders by other distributors overlapping with AR's accounts, but many would have been left unsold in your hands. *(Any distributor can cut his order right up until shipping day and we encourage all to do so. Only buy comics you can (a) pay for (b) sell).*

I stepped in to make the best of a bad situation. AR owed me a tremendous amount of money. So to try and cover the loss from that, I took over their comic accounts, an action that I hope over a matter of years might repay that loss.

(I pay my bills on time. If Alternate owed you tremendous amounts of money I would've told them to (a) pay or (b) be cut off. The last thing comics needs is bail-outs of loser businesses).

At the time I stepped in, I knew AR had problems in part because their comic ordering was out of control. Too many books were left unsold. So in my letter mailed to all publishers, including you, *(We received no such letter. I suspect you went to the big boys and when they gave in you figured the smaller publishers like myself would have to submit to your unilateral rule-change. They're easy to push around. I'm not.)* in late August, I asked that publishers allow me to return up to 20% of those books not ordered by me. The fact that your books were LATE is another issue entirely, but also a justifiable reason to return books. *(The books weren't late, they were held because Alternate wasn't paying us. When their accounts were brought up to date the books were released to them.)* I have stores come and go, and it is not fair for a publisher to take my order for June shipping and then deliver the comic in August or Sept without allowing me to modify my order. How can you set yourself above such a reasonable request? *(If it had been a request, I would've taken in under consideration and, in all likelihood, would've allowed it on the one occasion, so long as I had written assurances that it was a one-time occurence. It was presented as "Here. Have some of your books back." My response was equally blunt: "You're gonna pay for them or you're cut off.")* AR in particular was losing accounts like flies as they went down. I do not understand how you can feel, given this unusual situation, that I was somehow doing you an injustice. I accepted and sold through books that I never ordered. *(You took over a loser and you want me to pay for what I see as an on-going mistake).*

Yet my asking to return $325 in books is taken by you to be a cardinal sin against the non-returnable market. I spend over $1800 every issue for Cerebus . . . over $22,000 a year. Yet my asking to return, *(You didn't ask)* for the first time ever, this tiny number results in your punitive measure — refusing to ship to Denver. Not to mention not taking the books back. Actually you took away two points, since St. Louis supplied Denver's numbers by piggybacking Cerebus with weekly Sparta comics. You also refused to switch the quantity to St. Louis. *(If I'm taking a punitive action of dropping a drop-ship point I'm not going to add another one to make it less inconvenient).*

This makes me "anti-creator"? You paint yourself as the poor, hardworking artist, being disturbed in your commitment to your labor of love to have to deal with evil, nasty, contemptuous distributors. *(There is no need to 'deal with' distributors. You tell me how many books you want, we print the books and send them to you. Thirty days later you pay for them. That's the way it's been for ten years.)* Little black and white, isn't this? If I cared so much about money, I'm certainly in with wrong business. The profits are not here at the end of my year. *(If you started cracking down on the accounts who owe you money maybe the profits would be there.)* I'm here because I care about comics, as I have since I started collecting in 1964. Meanwhile you make a point of how much money you make on a book like High Society, with little investment, and you also love to picture yourself in nearly every issue at one party or another. *(Gee, Bud. I'm sorry I go to parties. If I stop will you be my friend?)* I don't think I'm quite as mean and money-grubbing, nor are you so dedicated and self-sacrificing as you like to have people think.

You conveniently overlook what good I have done over the years for your comics. Is that how you treat a supporter? I thought moving over 3000 books an issue was pretty good. *(It is. But I would assume you think it wise to invest in Cerebus because you know it will always sell. If you're just buying them as some charity to me, I 'd prefer you only order what you can sell.)* I moved thousands of Swords of Cerebus long after other distributors forgot it was still in print. I promoted Cerebus on my catalog covers, *(Bud; that was almost ten years ago)* and made special efforts to picture it and personally recommend each issue in every catalog for years. I've kept back issues in stock as long as you could resupply me, unlike nearly every other distributor. Every one of my quarterly Complete Catalogs has a long list of Cerebus back issues. *(Are they selling or is this some charity that I again owe you for?)*

What have I done to you? I tried to return a handful of books under circumstances some people might consider understandable, even if you don't. I'll be the first to admit that at times I may not be your fastest-paying account. But it is my support of worthy creators projects, in the form of my inventory of graphic novels and art books, that causes me cash flow problems. Maybe it's not so business-like to backstock Cerebus and carry other worthy comics and books long after they've stopped generating enough money to support them. *(Please, Bud. Just buy what you can afford)* You have no right to call me anti-creator. If it was not for my insisting on handling underground comics and all the rest of the special books I'm known for, the comic market would be that much more Marvel and DC oriented, *(The market, every month, is that much more Marvel and DC oriented)* a situation you don't want either.

What else have you got against me? That I didn't greet you at some long-ago San Diego convention with adulation and worship, *(That you didn't greet me as a friend. You said (a) there were damaged books that you weren't paying for (b) to get Cerebus out of the hotel and back to being a barbarian or sales would drop even further <this is why #'s 29, 30 and 31 are so hard to find>)* but that I told you of a problem with damage on Cerebus. That was a legitimate problem — I still remember the printer used to pack books 350 or more to a box and they'd all shuffle together like a pack of cards. A solution to this damage problem would mean more copies of Cerebus would make it to readers rather than back to the printer or into the dumpster. Is that so wrong? As your distributor, that is my job. You should have known how I felt about Cerebus from all the work I did to promote it. I thought it one of the best books coming out. You and Deni even gave me a page or original art to thank me for what I'd done. Did you want me to bow down, to kiss your ass, or to know the mighty Dave Sim cannot be bothered with such a menial problem as damaged comics? *(No, but "Hi, welcome to California. How was the flight?" wouldn't have been completely out of place.)*

In the end, you are going to do yourself in. You don't need any fabricated conspiracy of "suits" in the form of power-mad, evil-intentioned distributors. Restricting books like High Society to strictly mail order may make you more money in the short run, but your market will continue to contract because you are not reaching the new readers that such novelizations appeal to. *(I'm happy with things as they stand. Another forty thousand readers isn't going to make me sleep any easier.)*

Your incredibly antagonistic attitude towards distributors is not going to incite us to give it any special promotion. (*My eight years of cooperation didn't incite any great efforts either.)* Hell, what can I do with Cerebus #122? A cover feature? Lots of great copy? Big illustrations? The recent Flaming Carrot issue was the only one of real promotional

appeal out of a seemingly endless plot that drones on and on. *(I thought you were a big supporter of the plot that drones on and on I have trouble feeling that anyone who describes Cerebus that way is a supporter. I don't think you ever understood the book and I don't think you ever will.)* With you doing everything you can, in print, to have readers think I'm a schmuck, you can't expect much personal effort on my part to promote Cerebus. *(The contrast between one cover feature on your catalog ten years ago and now is not, to say the least , pronounced.)* I'm not a masochist.

Yet if I had High Society to promote, you know I could do a great job. You know that from my Swords promotions and sales. I could turn a lot of new customers onto Cerebus, as I sell such books to bookstores that don't handle comics. And comic shops can sell them to non-collecting browsers . . . not to mention Cerebus fans who refuse to order by mail . . . And believe me, after 18 years in the mail order business, I know that most people will not put a check in an envelope and mail it, not to mention trusting you to ship them an undamaged copy promptly. Too many horror stories no matter how good you do at filling orders. Too easy to spend those dollars on something they can see and touch at their local comic shop. *(We replace any even marginally damaged copies Since we doubled the thickness of the boxes the individual books are shipped in, the only return for replacements we've had have been for printing errors . . . I do grant you that these people exist Why not buy copies for them and add whatever you consider a fair profit margin? If they complain tell them it's my fault . It is my fault.)*

You have a right to sell High Society yourself. I don't deny that right. I'm not happy about it, since I think I've supported your comics, both good selling and bad over the years. I still have plenty of copies of Neil the Horse and Journey and others to prove it. I'd like to continue making all associated books that you produce available, as a source of profit; as (often) a source of enjoyment in handling good quality comics, and as a service to my customers, the retailers. Denying me High Society takes away all three points. *(Telling me I am obligated to sell to you removes the right you have conceded to me.)* But that is your right. Be that as it may, you compound what I think is a wrong practice by asking me to solicit for it, which costs me money, and then taking it away without a chance to work something out. As Gary Groth wrote, distributors could surely have figured out a way to get you to 6000 copies. You build a roadblock by making your terms exceptionally difficult (reorders of 180 copy minimum??) and you will never know how many more than 6000 we might have moved. I know that no one, including me, was going out on a limb by greatly overordering a book with such a high price, high minimums to get a decent discount, and that had been out on the market for months. We never got a chance to come back with those well-loved reorders. *("We'll make you rich, Dave, but you have to trust us that we'll keep your books well-stocked" If someone wants to make an offer — distributors shop, individual — I'll assess it and give them an answer. If a consortium offered to take 25,000 copies each of the four volumes at $10 each [this is strictly an example] that would total one million dollars. Since I don't have a million dollars I would be tempted. If someone offered to take 10,000 of one Volume at fifteen dollars each that would be one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I would consider it, but it would not be tempting. Interesting but not tempting. But I'm not getting offers. I'm getting guilt-trips, threats and a lot of pouting. Grow up, Bud.)*

As I started to say, you will do yourself in. *(With supporters like this, who needs detractors?)* You can't publicly degrade your customers (the distributors) and expect great performance. *(I have yet to see great performance; why would I expect it?)* You can't expand your readership by denying them new books that appeal to new readers. And after a while, even your loyal readers may tire of diatribes against injustices, imagined or otherwise, instead of entertainment. Gradually more and more readers will catch on that there are other creators out there that deliver a lot more than you do. Blame your lack of circulation on everyone but yourself. Its tradition: most publishers that can't sell enough copies look everywhere but at their own actions. We don't have to be friends. We hardly know one another, even though you like to stereotype me to fit your imagined role of the typical distributor, just a notch above rapists and child molesters. *(Most of the distributors are fine gentlemen who agree to disagree, but continue to play by the rules. You and Steve Geppi are the only ones causing me (and others), to question the distribution system.)* But it is too bad that you can't understand that your actions burns off your supporters, one by one, until there will be few people left to mourn Cerebus as it ceases publication short of #300. *(You heard it here first folks, I'm not going to make it to issue #300. Bud Plant says so.)* I've been abused enough not to care anymore. *(Fine. Just keep the purchase orders and cheques coming.)*

Sincerely,

Bud Plant

BUD PLANT WARNS THE PUMA BLUES

Dear Stephen and Michael ,

I understand Steve Geppi of Diamond has talked to you recently, and my hope is that any conflict between Diamond and Puma Blues can be circumvented. I, too, was shocked to read the announcement of a "benefit" issue of Puma Blues. The fact that Diamond could solicit and not miss an issue clearly made fiction of any "financial strain". And I think "emotional strain" is hooey. How about the emotional strain, not to mention the incredible waste of time, for distributors like myself, Geppi, and even Capital who have to contend with Dave's in-print attacks? You don't call **that** strain? Understanding a little more about both sides of the story, I hope that you begin to see that Diamond is not your problem. Dave Sim is.

In order to keep you informed, I have enclosed my recent letter to Dave, to which I have received no reply. I have, however, seen the latest Cerebus in which Dave drops my company name and address as one of his distributors, and lists me instead under "Oak Lawn Comics" and "Red Kryptonite", both of which make little or no sense to myself or my fellow workers. Dave continues on his illogical and nearly incomprehensible path. He hates Diamond's guts, yet he drops **MY** address because of my attempt to return a handful of books. Did I withhold payment on an invoice? No. In fact, I gave up any hope for the minor amount of credit in light of the incredible overreaction I was faced with and the issue has long been dropped . . . at least by my company.

I understand that Dave launched into yet another tirade against Diamond at the recent Capital Sales Meeting, to the point of making Capital's John Davis very uncomfortable about providing a format for such an outburst. If Diamond

was litigious, I'm sure Dave would have a lawsuit in his hands already for defamation, slander, libel, or what have you. That is what **real** corporate-types, the kind he hates, might have done long ago.

I would like you to know that I am in support of Diamond's position. Steve Geppi is an honest and respected person. By denying distributors High Society, after asking us to solicit for it, Dave costs us money in soliciting costs; he costs us face with our retailer accounts; and he then refused to discuss the issue. Bud Plant Inc could very well have taken the same action in saying "talk to me or I drop one of your titles". I frequently drop some but not all titles from a publisher, generally for lack of sales but sometimes because the publisher screws up and costs me money in publishing delays, resolicitations, price hikes, inaccurate counts, etc. He may not have done so on a particular book. But he makes working with his line inordinately expensive, so the first title to be dropped is the least selling one. Puma Blues is an example of this. Like it or not, Dave Sim is your liason to distributors as long as he is your publisher, and his actions effect how people feel about Puma Blues. You cannot separate a publisher from his publications.

What some people consider Steve Geppi's "flaw" is that he has the guts to be true to his religious convictions rather than bow to popular opinion and/or the almighty dollar. He does his best to not carry what compromises his beliefs. I know how difficult that is, because I did a "purge" of my own years ago when I decided to stop handling many titillating, sexually explicit underground comics. Anytime that is done, "hypocrite" and other labels come up because everyone will not agree with my criteria, nor is it possible to have a criteria that is perfectly black and white. Steve has the right to guide his business as he sees best. Neither of us said "you cannot publish this". We only say that we prefer not to distribute it through our business. This is more admirable than dumping all attempt at morality and ethics and castrating ourselves to the moral beliefs of others.

Bill Schanes may or may not have done to Dave what Dave claims is so. I understand much of what Dave holds against Bill may have been his brother Steve's doing, but Bill is wise in not furthering the issues by defending himself. But these issues from years ago are not clear enough, nor important enough to carry on such a vendetta that Dave attempts. Dave also has characterized me by our first meeting at a convention over a decade ago. I judge people over the long run, and by the sum of their actions. Dave sterotypes all business people as scum, and any person who doesn't measure up to what he expects becomes an instant and permanent enemy. As a self-proclaimed champion of creators, he has the audacity to label me "anti-creator" when I know of no support for such a claim. Talk about prejudice and prejudgement!

You should be aware that Steve's announcement at his Sales Meeting that Dave's action could force discontinuing relations with Aardvark-Vanaheim was met by publishers with understanding and strong applause. Publishers are first to defend each other against real or imagined distributor infractions, but many know Dave and see his actions are out of line. Gary Groth did me the kindness of defending me against Dave in his recent editorial , and numerous retailers and publishers have told me of their support for me and their disdain for Dave's methods and actions.

If Dave really had the balls, he'd sell Cerebus direct to retailers or even consumers. Instead, he continues to deal with distributors, all of whom he classifies as scum. That sounds pretty hypocritical to me. But he only goes "direct" on the safest of projects. I believe that he sincerely thinks that no distributor can live without his book, since it is clear he feels he can dump on anyone with impunity and not suffer any consequences. He can do it for a while, but not forever. I feel that I am dealing with an illogical child who's actions are silly. The profit I make from Cerebus is not worth this abuse, and is unimportant in my decision to handle Cerebus or not. If I have to take the loss out of my salary, it is a small price to pay for the right to stand up against the injustice of Dave's words and actions.

Why do we distributors have to put up with this invective against ourselves and our companies? I have put every bit as much, and probably more effort into providing a service to retailers and collectors for the last 18 years than Dave has put into his art. Yet as an artist he somehow can sweep my efforts aside because I'm only a "business person". Well, I rarely toot my horn, but I will stand on my record and maintain that I have done more for the comics industry than Dave ever has. I've reinvested profits in order to make more items available to retailers and collectors, to support projects I believe in, to support retailers through hard times, and to maintain a high integrity through customer satisfaction. I go way out of my way to influence retailers into expanding their product lines to include more than just Marvel and DC . . . to support alternative projects like Cerebus and Puma Blues.

Dave is a loose cannon on a pitching deck, and I hope for your sake that he does not drag you overboard along with him. And my reason for writing is less dramatic. It is in the hope that you guys are willing to listen to both sides of the issue and act rationally, regardless of what Dave dictates.

I have as much problem as Steve Geppi has in supporting a "benefit" Puma Blues that wrongfully demeans a distributor, and myself by association. I can deal with Dave dumping on me up to a point, but I feel a moral obligation to come to the defense of Diamond. I will not support Dave or you guys if you take a comic that I handle and use it as a vehicle for such action. If, as you told Steve, you present this from a unbiased viewpoint and include what should have been the conclusion to it in the fact that Diamond reinstated the book with no interruption or cost to you, then I suppose I can live with it as well as Steve can. But it will be the final straw if I find an invective-filled bunch of crap against a fellow distributor, and against Steve Geppi, who I have a high regard for. I would like to see an advance of this "editorial" to decide whether I can distribute this. Personally, it seems like the issue was better left dropped or explored in the news media, rather than involving your readers and risking your distribution in rehashing when it had been brought to a conclusion.

Sincerely,

Bud Plant

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MORE FUN AT PRENEY

with Dave and Kim

OKAY-- I PUT MY HEAD DOWN LIKE THIS, SEE? WITH MY EYE ON THE GLASS...
ONLY I KEEP LOOKING, RIGHT? LONGER...
AND LONGER ...AND LONGER ... UNTIL ...
:snicker:

Photos by JOHN PRENEY

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